DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 793 FL 021 337

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TITLE Japanese Language School: Aid or Hindrance to the Americanization of Japanese Americans in Hawaii?
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Asian Americans; Case Studies; Educational Attitudes; Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnicity; *Immigrants; *Japanese; *Language of Instruction; Native Language Instruction; Oral History; Personal Narratives; *School Role; Self Esteem; United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Hawaii

ABSTRACT

A study examined the experiences of 60 Japanese immigrants to Hawaii (Niseis), aged 61-80, who attended Japanese-language schools as children. Using a case study oral history approach, the study gathered oral testimonies through semi-structured interviews. Historical documents were also used as primary sources of information about the schools. Based on analysis of the responses and related data, it is concluded that the Japanese-language schools aided rather than hindered Americanization of this group, by providing a safe haven for instruction in areas not provided by the public schools. In addition to language instruction, students were exposed to character education that stressed values consistent with American norms while positively influencing ethnic identity and self-esteem. The schools also helped Niseis act as translators and transmitters of American culture to their parents, alleviating parent-child and parent-public misunderstandings common in immigration situations. It was discovered that public school authorities did not share in the public distrust of Japanese-language schools, and that the public opinion of the schools was unwarranted. It is proposed that the educational utility of the participants' experiences is illustrated in the high performance of Japanese-American combat units in World War II. (MSE)

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Japanese Language School: Aid or Hindrance to the Americanization of Japanese Americans in Hawaii?

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RUNNING HEAD: Japanese Language School

Shoho, A.R. (1993, April). *Japanese language school: Aid or hindrance to the Americanization of Japanese Americans in Hawaii?* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA.

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Japanese Language School: Aid or Hindrance to the Americanization of Japanese Americans in Hawaii?

Introduction

In recent years foreign language schools have experienced a revival in America. The primary reasons for the renaissance of foreign language schools has been: immigration of new ethnic groups (e.g., Ukrainians and other former Soviet Union ethnic groups, southeast Asian groups such as the Hmong) and foreign corporations who relocate employees and their families to America. A secondary, albeit minor reason for the renewed interest in foreign language schools has resulted from parental aspirations of Americans to have their children become bilingual and globally oriented (with the prospect for a long-term benefit (i.e., saleable skill)). In each case, there is a strong desire by parents to have their children acquire and maintain language and cultural ties to their ancestral background or culture of interest.

At the same time, public schools are struggling to create an educational environment conducive for immigrant and foreign children. From English as a second language to bilingual education to immersion programs, there appears to be no consensus on the part of educators on how to best deal with children of immigrants and foreigners. Complicating matters is a revival of an Americanization movement from the 1920's and 1930's which aspires to have everything from public school instruction to government documents to voting ballots printed in English only. Roland Kotani (1985) described the Americanization movement in the 1920's as "one language under one flag."

For new immigrants and foreigners in America, the issue of maintaining the ancestral culture and language while adapting to American norms and lifestyle is a difficult and puzzling dilemma. The present study attempts to shed light on the issue by presenting a historical investigation of what children of Japanese immigrants in Hawaii during the 1930's experienced as they attended public and Japanese language schools concurrently.

From 1885 until 1924 when the Immigration Quota Act of 1924, or more commonly known as the "Japanese Exclusion Act" was enacted, Japanese laborers arrived and eventually settled as immigrants in Hawaii and the mainland United States. The establishment of Japanese language schools in Hawaii was directly tied to Japanese immigration. Japanese language schools were build in communities throughout the territory to meet the needs of Japanese immigrants and their children.

In the aftermath of World War I, Japanese language schools in Hawaii found themselves embedded in controversy. The controversy surrounding the Japanese language school was accentuated by the Americanization movement sweeping across America. Japanese language schools were perceived as breeding grounds for anti-American values where students were indoctrinated to be loyal servants to the Emperor of Japan (Sanjume, 1939). The foundation for this perception of the Japanese language school

was grounded on public fear of anticipated conflicts with Japan, and the unfamiliarity and lack of understanding by the general public to the social value given to the Japanese language school by its clientele. Other studies (Schwartz, 1926; Hayashida, 1933; Onishi, 1943; Hiura, 1989) cited religion, the use of public funds, and semantics as damaging effects of Japanese language school attendance on the Americanization of Japanese American children.

During this time period, one of the primary goals of Hawaii's public schools was to promote Americanization of Niseis (second generation removed from Japan, first generation born in America). To effectively Americanize the children of Japanese immigrants (American citizens by birthright), public schools were asked to ingrain American values as a measure of social control (Shoho, 1990; Shoho, 1991). The sociocultural implications of Americanization meant that children of immigrants had to transform and accept, unquestionably, all American customs at the expense of ancestral customs (Carlson, 1987). As a result of the public schools' Americanization curriculum, the general public became suspicious of the Japanese language school agenda. Public apprehension led to the perception that Japanese language schools were hindering the Americanization of Niseis.

The theoretical framework for investigating the influence of Japanese language school on the Americanization of Niseis was derived from the general public's suspicion of the language school's agenda. In particular, did learning Japanese and its associating cultural traits predisposed students to anti-American activities?

The primary objective of the present study was to investigate whether the Japanese language school acted as an aid or hindrance to the Americanization of Japanese Americans (Niseis) in Hawaii during the 1930's. A secondary objective of the present study was to document the curriculum and learning environment of the Japanese language school.

Methodology

A case study oral history approach was used to examine the influence of the Japanese language school on the Americanization of Niseis in Hawaii. The primary method to gather data for the present study was the collection of oral testimonies from study participants. Between 1989 and 1991, the investigator collected oral testimonies from 60 study participants regarding their attendance as students at Japanese language schools in Hawaii. The oral testimonies were initiated using a semi-structured interview schedule designed to gather information from study participants about their educational experiences at Japanese language school. Interviews were transcribed and member checked for accuracy and reflection. Another primary data source involved the examination of historical documents such as government reports and Territorial Department of Public Instruction documents. These reports were invaluable pieces

towards constructing accurate interpretations. Supplementing primary sources were secondary data sources such as master's theses and doctoral dissertations (which were primarily completed during the 1930's and 1940's).

Subjects

There were 60 study participants (26 females and 34 males) involved in the present study. All study participants were Niseis who were educated in Hawaii public schools and attended Japanese language school. The ages of study participants ranged from 61 to 80 years with the average age being 70. The average length of attendance for study participants at a Japanese language school was 8 years.

Analysis of Data

To analyze the data gathered from study participants and historical documents, the present study used a constant comparative approach to generate "theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative approach involved analyzing data, formulating categories and recognizing patterns, making preliminary interpretations and constantly refining those interpretations throughout the study. To the extent possible, the results of the data analysis were verified by key informant study participants and triangulated with other data sources (such as Territorial Department of Public Instruction and Japanese language school records). Using Erickson's frame of qualitative data analysis, the purpose of the data analysis was to "generate empirical assertions largely through induction" and to establish an evidentiary warrant" for systematically examining confirming as well as disconfirming data and analyzing negative cases (Erickson, 1986). The data analysis advanced through multiple stages until identified categories became "theoretically saturated" (Strauss, 1987).

Findings

From the research findings it is possible to theorize that Japanese language schools in the 1930's enriched the Americanization of Niseis. There was no evidence to support the assertion that learning the Japanese language and its associating cultural traits predisposed its students to anti-American attitudes or behaviors. On the contrary, the intrinsic value of Japanese language school extended past language instruction and cultural appreciation. Students learned ethics and values for good citizenship (which were consistent with societal and family norms). The findings for the present study are discussed in four sections which address issues pertaining to the Japanese language school's: influence on Americanization, purpose, school operations, and curriculum and instruction.

Effect on Americanization

Based on the evidence provided by study participants and historical documents, Japanese language schools played an invaluable role in the Americanization process. Study participants confirmed the value of language school towards the Americanization process by claiming if students were not good citizens at home, they could not become good American citizens. This assertion was consistent with what Hanaoka (1927) found during an investigation of Japanese language schools. Attendance at Japanese language school aided the Americanization process by creating a home environment where misunderstandings resulting from a lack of communication were minimized due to a common medium between parent and child. Instead of hindering the Americanization process, Japanese language schools facilitated the process by incorporating lessons which were consistent with American values. Lessons in *shushin* (ethics), filial piety, and *on* (an obligation incurred which is repaid) equipped students with the necessary means for the responsibilities associated with American citizenship (Shoho, 1990). The following comments by study participants illustrate the contribution of Japanese language schools to the Americanization of Niseis:

> I think it [Japanese language school] facilitated [Americanization]. They stressed law abiding, respect of elders, and even going through college. . . . Obey the law, respect the law, be industrious, try your best, a lot of initiative, help your boss all you can, etc.--these are all Japanese things that we never had in English school. I can't think of Japanese courses without a lot of different points--morals, etc.

> It [Japanese language school] facilitated [Americanization]. In Japanese school they taught us values that are applicable in any situation. It was basically to learn the Japanese language, but it wasn't to teach Japanese history as we see Japanese history. The home was the central unit, and our lessons used to revolve around that.

Along with the positive views of study participants previously cited, another piece of evidence was discovered in a 1930 Hawaii Department of Public Instruction subcommittee report on foreign language schools. Japanese language schools were cited by the Governor's subcommittee foreign language schools as:

> . . . performing an important and useful function: They constitute a bridge between two cultures, and enable Hawaii's youth of Oriental parentage to continue in a knowledge of the language of their parents. This will be increasingly important as commercial and other contacts increase between the Orient and America.
>
> It is important that the influence of these schools shall be in no sense anti-American, for obviously the future of Hawaii's Oriental youth lies in America and any influence which tends to alienate them is harmful to them, and of course, injurious to the commonwealth. There is ample room for the development of a program of education in Oriental language and culture without going into the dangerous ground of anti-American propaganda (Governor's Advisory Committee on Education, 1930).

Consistent with investigators such as Reizo Watanabe, former editor-in-chief of *The Hawaii Hochi*, who believed "language schools clearly aided the process of Americanization" (Hiura, 1989), the present study lends support to the contention that Japanese language schools aided the Americanization process.

Purpose

The purpose of the Japanese language school evolved throughout the years (1890's to 1930's) from preparing students to return to Japan to training for American citizenship (Harada, 1934). Although language instruction was still the primary function of the language school, another purpose of the school was to create closer ties between students and their parents at home. By empowering students with the Japanese language and culture, Japanese language school had a stabilizing influence on the family unit. Another purpose of the Japanese language school pertained to:

> ...the increase in attendance of American citizens of Japanese ancestry, who would make their permanent residence here, the objective became training for American citizenship. Emphasis was therefore laid on bringing up strong and upright American citizens with a useful Japanese background, fully and well equipped to carry on the American culture and civilization (Harada, 1934).

A secondary purpose of Japanese language schools was to provide day care after public school. Although parents and Japanese school administrators did not perceive the Japanese language school as a day care center, the effect was, "they [the language school] provided a place where children could be cared for and receive instruction at the same time" (Wakukawa, 1938).

School Operations

The average Japanese language school operated six days a week for two hours on weekdays and for half a day on Saturday mornings. Classes on weekdays began after public school was over. According to study participants, school operations usually required two sessions of class with younger students attending class at 3 P.M. and older students coming in at 4 P.M. On Saturday, classes began in the morning and lasted until noon.

Unlike public school operations which divided children into twelve different grades, the Japanese language school operated on a six-four division of grades. The first six years (in rural schools, eight years) were considered elementary (*Shogakko*), while the next four were secondary years (*Chugakko* - middle school, *Kotogakko* - high school).

Available statistics for the bienniums 1929-1930 and 1931-1932 show the number of Japanese Americans who attended public schools and Japanese language schools concurrently. In 1929-1930, 41,151 Japanese American students attended public schools and 38,162 (93 percent) attended Japanese language schools after the public school (Department of Public Instruction, 1931). In

1931-1932, 43,641 Japanese American students attended public schools and 40,017 (92 percent) attended Japanese language schools after the public school (Department of Public Instruction, 1933).

Financial support for the Japanese language schools was based on student tuition fees, charitable contributions, subscriptions, and in cases where schools were affiliated with religious organizations, church support. There was no financial support from public funds. According to a Hawaii Department of Public Instruction survey of foreign language schools in 1930, the tuition fee was

> $1.00 to $1.25 per month per pupil . . . with a reduction in case two or more from the same family are in attendance. In some instances the fees are said to be much higher than this. At the high school [level], the fee is $3.00 per month,--$27.00 per year....The schools constitute no burden of expense upon the general public, as they are practically self-supporting, but the patrons of the schools are finding the expense more and more of a burden (Department of Public Instruction, 1930).

At first glance, tuition for Japanese language school did not seem excessive by today's standards. To provide some perspective, $27.00 was equivalent to one month's salary. Since the median Japanese household in 1940 consisted of an average of 4.84 people, including single adult male occupants, the amount required for educational expenses ranged from one-third to one-sixth of the family budget (Department of Commerce, 1943). Japanese parents endured the economic hardship by working extra hours, taking second jobs, and foregoing vacations. The importance of Japanese language school to parents was underscored by the financial burden they were willing to accept.

Curriculum and Instruction

The curriculum of the Japanese language school in the 1930's was radically different from what it had initially been in the early 1900's. Supplementing language instruction, the curriculum included Japanese history, geography, kendo and judo for boys; sewing, flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and etiquette for girls. According to Onishi (1943), Japanese language schools promoted greater understanding and peace between the United States and Japan, contributed meaningful ethical lessons, and enhanced the ethnic identity of Niseis. For parents, Japanese language schools assisted in at least three ways: by translating Eastern concepts to the West, by providing Niseis with character education, and by equipping Niseis with an economical tool for future utility.

The item identified by study participants as being the most beneficial was *shushin* (ethics). According to a female study participant, "If not for my Japanese school background, I don't think I could be a good American. I think they really taught *shushin*. They don't have that today. Because of the *shushin*, we turned out to be better Americans." *Shushin* was at the foundation of Japanese language school and defined as:

> Shushin, which refers to "ethics" or "morals," had been an important subject in the curriculum of the schools in Japan. It is in shushin that Japanese children are taught Japanese values, such as filial piety, respect for elders and superiors, obligation, perseverance, frugality, loyalty to one's group and country, courage, courtesy, etc. (Niyekawa-Howard, 1974).

For the most part, the values taught in *Shushin* were consistent with public school values except for the concepts of individuality versus conformity. Study participants had a sense of *deja vu* towards *shushin*. Most of the study participants wished public schools would instill a sense of *shushin* into today's students like they experienced in the 1930's.

Instructional methods at the language school were similar to the public school except more intense. Teaching the curriculum was accomplished through rote memory learning methods. In the classroom the *sensei* was the absolute authority whose word was never to be questioned. The lecture-recitation approach was standard among Japanese language school teachers. Study participants found their attention span was often pushed to the limit by unimaginative lectures and recitation. This was not the case for lessons in *Shushin*. In the case of *Shushin* lessons, study participants mentioned how teachers used stories and games to relay morals to students. The use of alternative methods, such as stories and games, to relay educational messages provided a partial explanation behind the popularity of *shushin* lessons. The divergence away from rote memory learning techniques was a welcomed relief to a majority of study participants.

According to study participants, the benefits derived from Japanese language school stretched beyond the ability to communicate in a foreign language. Armed with the ability to communicate in English and Japanese, study participants were drawn emotionally closer to their immigrant parents who, for the most part, communicated exclusively in Japanese.

The benefits of the Japanese language school (in relationship to Americanization) were realized and demonstrated during World War II when Japanese Americans defended the United States. Direct benefits of the Japanese language school were evidenced by the accomplishments of Japanese Americans who acted as interpreters and code translators in a special Pacific theatre unit of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). At the conclusion of World War II, General Charles Willoughby, Chief of Staff of Intelligence in the Pacific, stated that the contributions of Japanese American MISers "shortened the war in the Pacific by two years" (Rademaker, 1951) and saved one million lives (Harrington, 1979).

Indirect benefits of the Japanese language school during World War II were tied to lessons in *shushin*, filial piety, and a *Yamato damashii* ("never say die," "go for broke") spirit. Despite lack of physical stature, Japanese Americans enthralled with the *Yamato damashii* spirit battled against all odds to achieve their objective. As a World War II veteran study participant said:

> I remember when I went into the Army. The Haoles were all big. Our bags were sixty pounds, helmet--two and a half pounds. And I weighed 108 pounds. When we had training and when the landing craft hit the ground, we had to charge across the sand to the other side. Many times we wanted to give up but we gave that extra effort. We were brought up to give that extra effort.

According to study participants, the lessons at Japanese language school contributed to their success as defenders of America. Japanese American combat units such as the 100th Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team were recognized as the most decorated units during World War II. Within these combat units, more than 90 percent of Japanese American veterans attended Japanese language school (Hiura, 1989).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the present study, Japanese language schools aided rather than hindered the Americanization of Niseis. The Japanese language school provided a safe haven for Niseis to acquire instruction in areas not provided by the public school. Besides language instruction, students were exposed to character education which stressed values consistent with American norms. There is evidence to infer that *shushin* lessons had a positive influence on the ethnic identity and self-esteem of Niseis.

In addition to aiding the Americanization process, Japanese language schools also helped Niseis act as translators and transmitters of the American culture for their parents. Equipped with ability to communicate in their parents' language, students were able to alleviate parent-child and parent-public misunderstandings that often occur when there is an inability to communicate through a common medium.

As the present study demonstrated from historical documents, public school authorities did not publicly share the general public's distrust of Japanese language schools. The public's suspicion of Japanese language schools was found to be unwarranted. In contrast to what Japanese language school opponents cited as a public liability, the educational utility of Japanese language schools was reflected by the performances of Japanese American combat units during World War II. Complementing the battlefield performance of Nisei soldiers was the fact that there were no documented acts of anti-American activities by any Japanese American. The present study provides evidence to discredit the notion made by opponents of the Japanese language school that learning a foreign language and its accompanying cultural traits predisposes a person to acts of anti-Americanism. On contrary, Japanese language schools embraced the concept of loyalty to one's country (America) while raising the level of understanding and appreciation for one's ancestral country (Japan).

Implications of the Present Study

As most state and federal educational authorities grapple with tight budgets and projected cuts in services, the consequences for programs that adequately serve special populations are in jeopardy. Some of the programs on the chopping block are extracurricular activities, elective courses, and special

services. Of particular relevance to the present study are elective courses in foreign languages and programs such as English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education.

In the case of foreign languages, there is historical precedent from the present study to suggest that the teaching of foreign languages might be better handled by private organizations such as those associated with the Japanese language schools in Hawaii during the 1930's. At the present time, public schools for the most part are not doing an effective job of providing foreign language education. The previous statement is based on personal and qualitative evidence the investigator has collected through the years (the evidence is most students who take a foreign language do not become fluent or anywhere near proficient). The concept of privatization of foreign language education is worthy of consideration by public education officials as a means for reducing the public education budget. Privatization of foreign language education would also provide opportunities for more effective means of foreign language acquisition.

For programs such as English as a second language and bilingual education which mainly target children of immigrants, the consequences of budget cutbacks could mark the end of these programs in school districts across the country. The result would have children of immigrants (whose first language is not English) being forcibly immersed into classes where instruction is in English only. For many children of immigrants, the frustration of not having a common medium to communicate and understand school lessons could do irreparable damage academically and socially. To help minimize the damaging effects of forced assimilation, an implication of the present study would be to encourage the development of private foreign language schools to serve the community in a similar fashion as Japanese language schools did during the 1930's. These foreign language schools could act as a safe haven where children of immigrants learn to appreciate their ancestry and become productive citizens in a gradual process. The development of foreign language schools to serve children of immigrants is consistent with theories of cultural pluralism and the maintenance of a healthy ethnic identity.

Educational Importance of the Study

The present study represents a step towards understanding the role of foreign language schools in the lives of new immigrants and their families. For Japanese Americans in Hawaii during their early stages of development in America, the Japanese language school played a significant role by providing linkages for communication and understanding within the family unit. It is questionable whether these linkages would have been effectively established without the socialization process provided by the Japanese language school.

As new immigrants arrive from the former republics of the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, eastern Asia and other parts of the world, foreign language schools are being formed by private enterprises, religious

affiliations, and community centers. Should language schools be discouraged as they were in the 1930's for Japanese Americans or should they be nurtured for their contributions to American society? And does maintaining the language and culture of one's ancestors have an effect on one's Americanization (i.e., patriotism and loyalty)? Based on case study evidence for Japanese Americans, Japanese language schools aided the Americanization process. In addition, Japanese language schools nurtured a healthy set of *shushin* and self-pride among attendees. In reference to modern day language schools, the present study lends evidence to the value these schools contribute to the adjustment of immigrants and their children and hence, should be supported to the fullness extent possible. It would be a dark day in American history if advocates of an English Only movement or movement to abolish language schools (like those attempted in the 1920's) were ever to succeed.

The present study also has relevance to educational issues pertaining to bilingual education. Discussions on bilingual education revolve around many of the same issues encountered by the Japanese language school fifty years ago. Foreign language schools provide an environment for communication, understanding, and linkages between the ancestral and adopted cultures. By encouraging new immigrants and their families to appreciate their ancestral culture, a greater appreciation for the adopted culture is instilled. Furthermore, the functions of the foreign language school not only serve the immigrant family but those who choose to learn more about a particular culture.

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